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POWER FIBER LASER WITH MODE CONVERSION

The invention relates to power laser sources based on a pumped doped fiber whose core is multimode. Usually the fiber receives a beam emitted by a monomode oscillator. The continuous or pulsed beam output by the fiber is therefore an amplified beam, but its power remains limited. The invention is designed to produce compact and efficient fiber sources delivering a high-power beam with good beam quality.

The invention specifies that the pumped fiber is multimode and possesses a fiber core having a diameter greater than 30 μm . The amplified beam is then multimode and in the form of a source of plane waves of random amplitude and random phase.

The invention therefore relates to a pumped fiber laser comprising a monomode laser oscillator transmitting a monomode laser beam to a first end of a doped fiber, characterized in that the doped fiber is multimode and in that it also includes a spatial mode conversion device receiving the beam.

The various objects and features of the invention will become more clearly apparent from the following description given by way of example and from the figures which show:

- Figures 1a to 1c, simplified example embodiments of the invention;

- Figure 2, a detailed example embodiment of the invention;

- Figure 3, an alternative version of the device shown in figure 2;

- Figures 4a and 4b, a device of the invention in which the multimode fiber comprises a multitude of doped cores; and

- Figure 5, a simplified alternative version of the device of the invention.

The production of laser sources delivering power greater than 1 kW has been demonstrated at the present time in several laboratories using diode-pumped Nd:YAG rods. Two types of architecture result in such performance: single oscillator and "MOPA" configuration, consisting of an oscillator, an amplifier and possibly a phase conjugation mirror. The object of the invention is to propose a diode-pumped fiber source architecture of the MOPA type. Continuous power greater than 100 W can be obtained using quasi-monomode fibers. Taking these results into account, we propose to produce sources delivering more than 1 kW of power using multimode fibers, the volume of the gain medium of which is very much greater than that of a monomode fiber. To guarantee diffraction-limited beam quality, a mode conversion device is introduced, which consists of a nonlinear medium serving to record a dynamic hologram or possibly a fixed (volume) hologram.

Figure 1a shows a simplified example embodiment of the invention. In this example embodiment, the fiber is self-pumped. It comprises a multimode optical fiber whose core is doped so as to have an active medium. The diameter of this core is preferably greater than 20 μm or even greater than 50 μm . It may even be envisaged to have fibers whose core diameter is greater than 80 μm . The optical fiber receives a laser beam coming from an oscillator 2. This laser beam is monomode. The laser beam travels along the optical fiber and is reflected by the phase conjugation mirror 5, which reflects a beam self-pumping the fiber 1. A laser beam is emitted by the fiber toward the semitransparent mirror 4 or a polarization splitter which reflects the light energy received from the fiber 1 onto a mode conversion device 3.

This mode conversion device is produced in a nonlinear material in which a volume hologram has been recorded and which will be explained later.

5 Thus, since the fiber 1 is multimode and very large in diameter compared with the fibers normally used in this type of laser, the beam emitted toward the device 3 is multimode - more specifically this beam is the
10 superposition of a multitude of plane waves of random amplitude and random phase. Under these conditions, using a fiber which is thus multimode, a relatively powerful beam is emitted and, with the aid of the mode converter 3, an output beam OB is emitted which is of optical quality such that the beam OB is monomode.

15 Figure 1b is an alternative version of the device shown in figure 1, in which the phase conjugation mirror 5 has been replaced with a fiber of the Brillouin fiber type. This Brillouin fiber is of the type described in
20 French patent No. 2 669 441 filed on November 16, 1990.

Figure 1c is another alternative version of the device shown in figure 1a, in which the multimode fiber 1 is a Brillouin fiber.

25 The device shown schematically in figure 2 incorporates the following elements:

- a monomode laser oscillator 2;
- a fiber amplifier 1;
- 30 • a holographic medium 3 for mode conversion.

According to the embodiment in figure 2, the first end 1.1 of the fiber 1 receives the monomode beam emitted by the laser oscillator 2. The second end 1.2 of the
35 fiber allows this beam, after being amplified in the fiber, to be transmitted toward the holographic medium 3. The latter also receives a portion of the monomode beam delivered by the laser oscillator 2. The two beams interfere in the holographic medium and, as will be

explained below, this results in the energy of the amplified beam output by the fiber being transferred into the monomode beam delivered by the laser oscillator 2.

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The oscillator 2 consists of a monomode low-power (> 1 W) source: the source is monofrequency, with a certain coherence length and with diffraction-limited spatial beam quality. By way of example, this is a diode-pumped conventional oscillator or a fiber laser.

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The multimode amplifier is therefore a fiber 1, the pumping of which is provided by power diodes 8.1, 8.2, ... 8.3, in a longitudinal or transverse configuration. The core of the fiber has a diameter, for example, of 100 μm . According to the conventional technique, the fiber core, which constitutes the gain medium, is pumped by total reflection of the pump wave at the cladding interface inside the fiber.

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The mode conversion device 3 consists of a variable-index nonlinear medium. The low-power beam B1 output by the oscillator and the multimode beam B2 output by the fiber amplifier interfere in the volume of this medium. The two beams B1 and B2 are transmitted to the mode conversion device 3 via a monomode fiber 6. It is known that the two-wave type of interaction in the conversion device allows all the energy of the intense multimode beam B2 to be transferred into the monomode beam B1 provided that the two-wave gain coefficient of the material is high enough. This interaction with the beam clean-up function has been demonstrated with the following nonlinear mechanisms: photorefractive crystals of LiNbO_3 , BaTiO_3 , SBN, etc.; thermal nonlinearities: dyes, liquid crystals, etc.; Brillouin effect in multimode fibers.

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The device in figure 2 allows the intense beam B2 to be completely depleted to the benefit of amplification of

the monomode beam B1. If the hologram is a dynamic hologram, the material adapts to the slow variations in the pattern of interference between the beam delivered by the fiber 1 and the beam delivered by the laser oscillator 2.

The mode conversion device may also be made from a fixed holographic component, for example a photorefractive crystal followed by a procedure of fixing the photoinduced grating, or by a hologram recorded in the volume of a photopolymer material. In this, since the component is fixed, it no longer adapts to the change in the interference pattern. The mode conversion is effective only if the relative phase between the various modes radiated by the fiber remains fixed. This configuration does not require a reference beam for read-out. The system therefore is as shown in figure 3. The end 1.2 of the fiber 1 is coupled via the lens 7 to the mode conversion device 3. The combination of the fiber end 1.2, the Fourier lens and the holographic mode conversion component then constitutes a compact structure.

As an example, a source having a continuous power of greater than 1 kW emitting at $\lambda = 1.053 \mu\text{m}$ may be achieved under the following conditions:

- 1 W Yb-fiber oscillator;
- 30 dB gain amplifier;
- mode conversion by Rh-doped or LiNbO₃-doped BaTiO₃ crystal sensitized to $\lambda = 1.053 \mu\text{m}$;
- pumping power: 2 to 2.5 kW.

The reference beam delivered by the laser oscillator 2 is transmitted via a monomode fiber 6, the length of which is equal to that of the amplifying fiber 1. This condition relaxes the constraint on the coherence length of the oscillator.

The device of the invention allows a high power to be extracted from a multimode fiber amplifier. Under these conditions, all the associated nonlinear effects (Brillouin, Raman, etc.) are reduced since the emitted
5 power density remains less than the damaged threshold of the interface.

A mode conversion device ensures coherent transfer of the energy emitted in a spatial mode with
10 diffraction-limited quality.

The device proposed also carries out mode conversion if the amplifying fiber consists of an ordered or disordered assembly of monomode fiber cores, as shown
15 in figure 4a.

Injection by the oscillator into an ordered array of monomode fiber cores takes place via a multiple-wave grating.
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As shown in figure 5, the combination of multimode fiber + spatial mode conversion device may constitute an oscillator emitting a monomode beam. In this case, the fiber 1 pumped by one or more diodes 8 and the mode
25 converter are placed in an optical cavity 9, 10.

It should be noted that the fiber may be a polarization-maintaining fiber. Otherwise, the mode converter must be able to handle both polarization
30 components.

Finally, the laser may operate in continuous mode or pulsed mode.